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Ms. Judith Smith, Administrator
Dept. of Asian Art
Metropolitan Museum of Art
1000 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10028-0198

Dear Judith,

I promised to send you a transcript of what I said at the beginning of the session I chaired. Here it is, more or less, as well as I can reconstruct it from rough notes. I felt that the discussions were getting a bit heavy (in a positive way, on the whole) and that injecting something more frivolous would be salutary at that point. So:

(Various complimentary remarks on the exhibition and symposium) We have reached the halfway point in the symposium--three half-day sessions over, three to go--and are all feeling a bit exhausted but exhilarated. I'm grateful to Jerome Silbergeld for giving me my metaphor, when he proposed that after "Tung Ch'i-ch'ang: The Exhibition" and "Tung Ch'i-ch'ang: The Symposium" we might have "Tung Ch'i-ch'ang: The Theme-park." He meant this, I suppose, as a vision for the future; but I would suggest that we all feel as if we'd spent the last day-and-a-half in just that theme-park. Its attractions include: "The Misty River and Piled Peaks Thrill Ride," going in a roller coaster over those cliffs and coming out that cavern at the bottom, down the great water sluice. Game booths where we can play "Deconstruct Tung for a Dollar," or "Pin the Signifier on the Signified." A safari trek, led by Dick Barnhart, through the Jungle of Misattributions--each of us has a machete knife, and as Ming paintings masquerading as Sung paintings pop up, we chop them down. Best of all, the great Painting History Sports Arena, where every day the Southies play the Northies, and the Southies always win. They win in spite of the fact that they are all moonlighting academics from the local college, and are up against seasoned professionals; they always win because the rules are written that way. And the audience loves this because they are always rooting for the Southies; they have been conditioned to do so by a mysterious gas released in the arena, and by subliminal messages whispered

over the loudspeakers: Child-mind. P'ing-tan. Awkwardness beats skill. It is all very exciting and satisfying. And now Wai-kam has added another attraction: the Tung Ch'i-ch'ang Pavilion of X-rated Delights. There is really something for everybody.

That is really a good metaphor for this symposium, which is exciting, tiring, stirring, engaging, going in all directions at once, and has raised forcibly all the old issues and arguments along with some new ones. It's obvious that Tung is somewhat under attack; in fact there's scarcely any aspect of his activity that isn't under attack: politically (from Nelson Wu's article on "Apathy in Government" onward), socially, morally. His "disinterested" practice of painting: in C.C. Riely's article for the catalog, in Shan Guoqiang's paper, in an unpublished paper by Hsingyuan Tsao on Tung's and Li Jih-hua's "painting business." His theories, which we have heard characterized as inconsistent, lacking in any coherent view. His connoisseurship, in Dick Barnhart's paper and Kohara's for the catalog, which chronicles his shifting views on Wang Wei. Only his painting and calligraphy remain relatively exempt, at least so far, from heavy criticism. What is really under attack is the persona that Tung constructed for himself, and that has been maintained, generally, for three centuries; we are working at last to tear most of this away, to reveal the "real Tung." (Not that there is any "real Tung," at least for us.)

How to respond to all this? It's easier to list wrong responses than to suggest right ones. Wrong ones, as I would see it, include: trying to absolve him from these charges: it won't work, the dike won't hold, the evidence and the arguments are too strong. Allowing the newly-recognized negative aspects of Tung's activities to color adversely our appraisals of his paintings and calligraphy. Trying to separate the "different Tungs," and say that the ones under attack aren't really relevant to Tung the great artist. I think Sherman Lee was arguing in that direction yesterday; I wouldn't agree. None of these seems to me the way to go. What we have to do, however we do it, is accept Tung whole, as a great artist, warts and all, and deal somehow with that whole person. Tu Wei-ming proposed one good direction this morning: seeing him as someone who positioned himself in history, created his own relationship to the past of his art, a powerful achievement in itself.

Tung's artistic achievement will, I think, be undiminished in the end by all the deconstructing efforts; but analyses of the less-than-admirable sides of Tung will affect, without necessarily coloring negatively, our readings of the paintings (as they do our experience of Wagner's music or Ezra Pound's poems.) We have to recognize the intense (perhaps un-Taoist)

purposefulness behind a lot of his work, and relate it to factors in his situation and motivations as we come to understand them better. Seeing Tung clear-eyed and in context is not to absolve him; it is to understand his positions and actions and responses within a certain arena of history, of economic and social change, and to allow this understanding to refine and deepen our interpretations of the paintings--why they aren't lovable, as many of Shen Chou's are, or liberating, like many of Shih-t'ao's, or startling but strangely comforting, like Kung Hsien's. Why they are uningratiating but inescapable.

All the best. Yours,



James Cahill
Professor, History of Art